At first glance, it is a bizarre law: the European limit value for nitrogen oxide is 40 micrograms per cubic metre of air; many cities are struggling to keep it. And what does the covenant do? It excludes the most effective consequence for many cities. Driving bans for diesel should only be allowed where the value is beyond 50 micrograms. If it gets too colourful with the limit value, it will simply be raised - even with the blessing of the EU.

But things are not as simple as that. In fact, the Federal Administrative Court has repeatedly emphasised the principle of proportionality. If a city that exceeds the limit by only a few micrograms were to be banned en masse from diesel vehicles, the introduction and implementation of the ban would hardly be in a good relationship to the problem. Brussels, too, has not called for any driving bans - but simply good air in Europe.

For cities, this means, conversely, that they must do what is proportionate, and quickly do so. The limit value in itself remains the old one, and an EU lawsuit against the federal government continues. Cities need to promote alternatives to cars, switching buses to clean drives. A driving ban may be eliminated by law. But the bad air is not.